

Possible pay raise for lawmakers irritates teachers

By [Jerry Cornfield](#),
Everett Herald
April 30, 2015

State lawmakers are up for a raise in the next two years.

It looks like it will be a lot larger than what they're considering giving thousands of state workers and public school teachers.

On May 13, the [Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials](#) is set to vote to give lawmakers [an 11 percent raise](#). That would be more than double the percentage increase that those same legislators are considering for state workers and teachers.

Teachers know this and are incensed about it.

Some have written the commission urging it to be less generous.

And they made their feelings clear when Gov. Jay Inslee spoke at Saturday's rally of 5,000 educators and supporters on the steps of the state Capitol.

Inslee acknowledged that it has been six years since the state provided a cost-of-living adjustment for teachers. When he pledged to fight to secure a "real COLA" of 4.8 percent in the next budget, he was briefly drowned out by a chant of "12 percent, 12 percent" — a slightly off reference to the pending double-digit pay hike for lawmakers. (Inslee, by the way, stands to get a 4 percent raise).

To be fair lawmakers aren't involved in the process of setting their own pay. That's the role of the commission, an independent panel expected to operate free of political encumbrances.

Its members aren't supposed to be swayed by the salary woes faced by teachers. Nor are they to be affected by knowing the 147 men and women in the Legislature have been held in contempt by the state Supreme Court for violating constitutional dictates for school funding.

Commissioners derived their recommendations from a consultant's analysis using something called the Willis System that tries to put a value to various duties associated with a particular job. In this instance the consultant calibrated lawmakers' responsibilities and earnings against those of nonunion state administrators and their wages and concluded lawmakers are underpaid.

Their last raise came in 2008. Commissioners in January proposed an 8 percent increase starting Sept. 1 and another 3 percent on Sept. 1, 2016.

This would push pay for 143 lawmakers from [\\$42,106 to \\$46,839](#). Leaders of the four caucuses have higher salaries. The Speaker of the House and Senate Majority Leader would make \$55,738 while the House and Senate minority leaders would earn \$51,288.

Lawmakers aren't the only ones in line for higher salaries. Commissioners are suggesting 4 percent increases for the governor, eight other statewide elected office-holders and every judge from district court up to the Supreme Court. For some jobs, the panel wants to add in a little more such as an extra 8 percent for the state treasurer and 3.5 percent for the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

Under the proposal, Inslee would make \$173,617 in 2016, up from \$166,891 today, and Chief Justice Barbara Madsen's earnings would climb from \$172,531 to \$185,661.

All these raises are not set in stone.

On May 13, commissioners will hold a final public hearing before adopting a new wage chart for the legislative, executive and judicial branches. [It must be filed](#) with the Secretary of State by June 1 and the new salaries would go up Sept. 1.

But they can be blocked by referendum. One would need to collect and turn in at least 123,186 valid signatures of registered voters before Sept. 1. If successful, the issue could be on the ballot this fall.

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